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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended for teachers bringing a class to visit the National Archives in Washington, D.C., for a workshop on primary documents. The National Archives serves as the repository for all federal records of enduring value. Primary sources are vital teaching tools because they actively engage the student's imagination so that he or she may visualize past events and make sense of their reality and meaning. This publication concerns a workshop on the U.S. Constitution. In addition to historical information on the U.S. Constitution, background on two documents involved in the workshop--George Washington's copy of the first draft of the Constitution and the 19th Amendment--is included. Photographs of these two documents as well as two student exercises also are provided. (DB)

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ED 364 451

"The Blueprint of Democracy"

The United States Constitution

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"The Blueprint of Democracy"

The United States Constitution

FOR THE TEACHER

Thank you for arranging the primary document workshop "The Blueprint of Democracy" for your class. For too many students, history is just an endless string of dates and events chronicled in a textbook. Primary sources actively engage the student's imagination so that he or she may visualize past events and sense their reality and meaning. Before your workshop, it would be advantageous to introduce your students to primary sources with the poster-size documents and the attendant exercises we have provided. The exercises may be photocopied and should be adapted to fit your objectives and teaching style. We hope that these preliminary materials and our workshop will enhance your class's understanding and appreciation of the blueprint of democracy, the United States Constitution.

The United States Constitution

The Constitutional Convention, which met in the State House (now called Independence Hall) at Philadelphia from May 25 to September 17, 1787, was a supreme event in both American and world history. The United States Constitution, the resilient and enduring charter of government under which 13 fledgling states were eventually forged into a superpower, emerged during those unmercifully hot summer days. It was the product of 55 delegates from 12 of the 13 states (Rhode Island did not send delegates). Using reason, compromise, practical experience, and a command of political philosophy, these men decided how a people should govern themselves. Three months after the Convention's completion, although he was not a participant, John Adams wrote that the delegates had demonstrated "if not the greatest exertion of human understanding, the greatest single effort of national deliberation that the world has ever seen."

Before 1787, advocates of reform exchanged correspondence to muster support for a convention to revise the first charter of the government of the United States, the Articles of Confederation. As early as 1780 it was apparent to George Washington that the Confederation was defective; he wrote to Fielding Lewis: "Our measures are not under the influence and direction of one Council, but thirteen, each of which is actuated by local views and politics. . . . We are attempting the impossible." The voluminous correspondence of Washington and other leading Americans laid the foundation for the ground-breaking interstate conferences and conventions that sought greater unity among the states throughout the 1780s. The last of these conventions met at Annapolis, MD, in 1786. Twelve delegates from five states gathered there in September; their report, drafted by the young Alexander Hamilton, called for a general convention. This report finally became a reality on February 21, 1787, when the Confederation Congress adopted the resolution authorizing the "Federal" Convention.

The Convention consisted of state Governors, chief justices, attorneys general, and many delegates to the Confederation Congress, as well as several distinguished Americans who, like Benjamin Franklin (at 81, the oldest Convention member), agreed to come out of retirement to participate one last time in American politics. The willingness of these men to place their prestige at risk by attending the Convention testified to its legitimacy and to the severity of the problems facing the United States. Senior statesmen such as George Washington of Virginia, Roger Sherman of Connecticut (the only man to sign the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and later the Constitution), and John Dickinson of Delaware were veterans of colonial politics and helped lead the struggle against Britain. They provided an essential ability to compromise and an acute sensitivity to the often clashing interests of the states. Some leading figures were not in attendance. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were the American ministers to London and Paris at the time, but they kept abreast of the Convention's progress.

The delegates elected Washington president of the Convention, and he immediately appointed a committee to prepare rules of order and procedure. By May 29, rules were adopted to ensure the secrecy of the proceedings, and the option to reopen any matters for further debate was granted as well.

Edmund Randolph of Virginia then submitted for consideration the Virginia Plan. Largely the work of James Madison, the Virginia Plan discarded the Articles and framed an entirely new constitution. Its 15 resolutions proposed the creation of a supreme national government with separate legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Under the Virginia Plan, however, population would determine representation in both houses of Congress. This element of the plan was anathema to the small-state delegates, so in order to protect the principle of state equality, they decided to rally behind William Paterson's New Jersey Plan. Paterson's plan preserved each state's vote in a unicameral legislature, but the delegates rejected it on June 19. Nearly a month of bitter debate passed before the Connecticut delegation proposed the "Great Compromise" of July 16. It provided a way out of the impasse by apportioning the House of Representatives on the basis of population and by providing each state with two votes in the Senate. Deadlock had been subjugated and the Constitution saved.

Washington's Copy of the First Printed Draft of the Constitution

On August 6 the first printed draft of the Constitution was submitted by the Committee of Detail. The reproduction on the front of your poster is Washington's copy of the first page of that draft. The unfamiliar preamble and Washington's notations reveal the extensive revision process that took place in the Convention and in its Committee of Style and Arrangement from August 6 to September 15. Gouverneur Morris, a member of the committee, was the chief architect of the final document. As your class examines page 1 of Washington's copy and compares it to a copy of the finished product, they will discover that one of Gouverneur Morris's most important contributions to our present Constitution was his revision of the preamble. This change was necessitated by the decision of August 31 that the new government should go into operation only upon ratification by nine states. At that time, no one could predict which states would ratify and which would stall or even refuse to join, so Morris sensibly chose to eliminate any mention of individual states. Thus, somewhat fortuitously, "We the People of the United States" became the sovereign source of the Constitution.

The history of the Constitutional Convention presents a fitting opportunity to discuss with your class the importance in a healthy democratic society of toleration for opposing political viewpoints and the ability to compromise. While to those involved the Convention process may have often seemed unnecessarily erratic and a waste of time, students can see that it was the best way in which representatives of a free people could have formed a set of operational rules of government while, at the same time, settling their outstanding political differences. Each delegate's respect for the views of his colleagues and his ability to compromise when those views differed is perhaps the most important legacy of the Convention.

The 19th Amendment

The United States Constitution has become the oldest national constitution in the world, fulfilling Chief Justice John Marshall's vision that it was "meant to endure for ages to come, and to meet the various crises of human affairs." This longevity is due in large measure to the Constitution's ability, through the amendment process, to solve "the various crises" it has confronted over the past two centuries. For example, under the Constitution property qualifications once limited the right to vote, whereas the franchise today is open to all citizens at the age of 18. The Founding Fathers regarded suffrage as a privilege; Americans today consider it a right. But this interpretation obscures long periods throughout which various groups such as women and black men were disenfranchised. Indeed, if there is any recurring theme in the constitutional amendments since the Bill of Rights in 1791, it is the enlargement of the franchise.

Of particular importance among these enfranchisement amendments is the 19th. Ratified in 1920, it enfranchised women, the largest group of people in American history ever denied suffrage. On the back of your poster is a reproduction of the joint resolution of Congress that proposed the 19th amendment. This copy of the proposed amendment provides your class with an opportunity to explore the Framers' reasons for a constitutional amendment process. Ask your students what might have happened if the Framers had not provided some way to amend the Constitution. Later generations might have been tempted to abandon the Constitution, but the Framers had created a living document by creating an amendment process that respected the wisdom and progress of the future.

What is the National Archives?

Established in 1934, the National Archives helps preserve our nation's history by serving as the repository for all federal records of enduring value. It thus serves the federal government, researchers of many topics, and the American public. Because the federal records reflect and document more than 200 years of American development, the records in the National Archives holdings are great in number, diverse in character, and rich in information.

Before your students participate in a tour or a workshop, they should be familiar with the mission of the National Archives. We recommend that you present your students with the following vocabulary words and questions:

- *Please define Archives, Archivist, Document, Record, Preservation.*
- *Why do you and your family save documents? Why are they important?*
- *The U.S. government keeps its records in the National Archives.*
  Why does the government save its records?
- *What kinds of records might the U.S. government want to save?*
- *What famous documents are at the National Archives?*

You will be called by the National Archives docent assigned to your class about a week before the date of your tour or workshop. If the workshop will be held in your classroom, then please be prepared to relay information concerning directions, parking, and school check-in procedures.

Whether it is our Behind-the-Scenes Tour or one of our Primary Document Workshops, we are confident that the experience will provide an exciting new look at history. In order to assess our performance, we would appreciate your cooperation in completing the enclosed evaluation form and returning it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

If you have any additional questions regarding your tour or workshop, please contact the Volunteer and Tour Office Staff at 202-501-5205.

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Exercise I:

Washington's Copy of the First Printed Draft of the Constitution, first page.

Compare and contrast page 1 of the first printed draft of the Constitution with a present copy of the Constitution.

1. How is the preamble in George Washington's copy different from the preamble we have today?

_____

_____

2. How was the basis of our national government changed when "We the People of the United States" replaced the list of individual states in the first draft?

_____

_____

3. Define "Posterity." What kind of Constitution would secure the "Blessings of Liberty" for the Framers' "Posterity"? _____

_____

4. Article I, section 4, of the present Constitution is similar to which one of Washington's notations? What amendment changed this provision?

_____

_____

5. Article IV, sections 3 and 6, of Washington's copy are similar to which section of Article I of your current copy of the Constitution? Define impeachment.

_____

_____

6. Which states would have disapproved of Article IV, section 5, in the first draft of the Constitution? Why would they have wanted it "struck out"?

_____

_____

Exercise II:

The 19th Amendment

Read Article V of the Constitution, and then examine the copy of the 19th amendment.

1. How is the Constitution amended?

_____

_____

2. Can amendments be proposed and ratified without the Congress? _____

3. How many times has the Constitution been amended? _____

4. What is the date on the copy of the 19th amendment? Who was the President at the time?

_____

5. Who was the Speaker of the House? Who was the Vice President? What other office does the Vice President hold?

_____

6. Define "suffrage." Why were women denied the "right of suffrage"?

_____

_____

7. How did the 19th amendment redefine "the People" in the Constitution's preamble?

_____

8. What other amendments have also redefined "the People"?

_____

9. Do you think the amendment process has successfully handled new challenges over the years? Why or why not?

_____

_____

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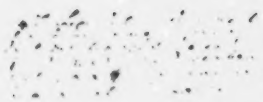

WE the People of the States of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, South-Carolina, and Georgia, do ordain, declare and establish the following Constitution for the Government of Ourselves and our Posterity.

ARTICLE I.

The stile of this Government shall be, "The United States of America."

II.

The Government shall consist of supreme legislative, executive and judicial powers.

III

The legislative power shall be vested in a Congress, to consist of two separate and distinct bodies of men, a House of Representatives, and a Senate; [redacted] In each of these, in all cases, have every power whatsoever. The Legislature shall assemble once and [redacted] on December in every year.

IV.

Sect. 1. The Members of the House of Representatives shall be chosen every second year, by the people of the several States comprehended within this Union. The qualifications of the electors shall be the same, from time to time, as those of the electors in the several States, of the most numerous branch of their own legislatures.

Sect. 2. Every Member of the House of Representatives shall be of the age of twenty-five years at least; shall have been a citizen of the United States for at least [redacted] years before his election, and shall, at the time of his election, be a resident of the State in which he shall be chosen.

Sect. 3. The House of Representatives shall, at its first meeting, and until the number of citizens and inhabitants shall be taken in the manner hereinafter directed, consist of sixty-five Members, of whom three shall be chosen in New-Hampshire, eight in Massachusetts, one in Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, five in Connecticut, six in New-York, three in New-Jersey, eight in Pennsylvania, one in Delaware, six in Maryland, ten in Virginia, five in North-Carolina, five in South-Carolina, and three in Georgia.

Sect. 4. As the proportions of numbers in the different States will alter from time to time; as some of the States may hereafter be divided; as others may be enlarged by addition of territory; as two or more States may be united; as new States will be erected within the limits of the United States, the Legislature shall, in each of these cases, regulate the number of representatives by the number of inhabitants, according to the [redacted] the rate of one for every forty thousand.

Sect. 5. All bills for raising or appropriating money, and for fixing the salaries of the officers of government, shall originate in the House of Representatives, and shall not be altered or amended by the Senate. No money shall be drawn from the public Treasury, but in pursuance of appropriations that shall originate in the House of Representatives.

Sect. 6. The House of Representatives shall have the sole power of impeachment. It shall choose its Speaker and other officers.

Sect. 7. Vacancies in the House of Representatives shall be supplied by writs of election from the executive authority of the State, in the representation from which they shall happen.

V.

George Washington's Copy of the First Printed Draft of the Constitution

First page National Archives

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Sixty-sixth Congress of the United States of America;

At the First Session,

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Monday, the nineteenth day of May, one thousand nine hundred and nineteen.

JOINT RESOLUTION

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States.

"ARTICLE ———.

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

"Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

F. H. Gillett

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Thos. R. Marshall

Vice President of the United States and President of the Senate.

The 19th Amendment

National Archives

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